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U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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Contact: Public Affairs, 817-886-1306
public.affairs@usace.army.mil

Corps urges boating and water safety during Memorial Day weekend

FORT WORTH, Texas – The Memorial Day weekend initiates a spike in visitation at U.S. Army Corps of Engineer lakes which runs through the Labor Day weekend. With this increase in visitation also comes an increase in fatalities. Statistics maintained by the Fort Worth District show that there have been 10 fatalities at area lakes so far this year. There were also seven fatalities during the same period last year. But the staggering figure in the minds of Corps leadership is the average of 32 fatalities at District lakes over the past three years.

“Park Rangers incorporate water safety training into all aspects of public outreach and education, but accidents can and do occur, said Fort Worth District Commander, Richard J. Muraski. “It is vital that visitors know and practice personal, water and boating safety when in or around the water.”

Public safety is the Corps’ main priority and the Fort Worth District has embarked on a campaign to reduce fatalities at area lakes by 50 percent from last year where 29 people lost their lives at Corps lakes.

“This is a lofty goal but it is imperative that we strive to meet it,” said Fort Worth District Chief of Operations, Charlie Burger. “But we cannot do this alone – we need everyone to take an active role in practicing boating and water safety.”

One way lake visitors can help reduce the number of fatalities is to always wear a properly fitted and approved life vest when in and around the water. Corps officials estimate that approximately 90 percent of those who drowned at Corps of Engineers lakes may have survived if they had worn properly fitted and life jackets.

Corps officials also encourage everyone planning to enjoy time at area lakes to avoid alcohol because almost half of all drowning fatalities involve alcohol. Research has shown that just one beer can impair balance, vision, judgment, and reaction time. Boating fatigue combined with alcohol consumption intensifies the effects and increases accident risk.

Swimmers of all ages need to take precautions before enjoying the water as drowning is the second leading cause of accidental deaths in persons 15 to 44 years of age. Many young children are especially vulnerable as they do not know how to swim or are weak swimmers. Therefore Corps officials ask that parents watch their children at all times when around any body of water.

Cliff diving has become a fun and exciting event for some lake goers. This fun has turned into tragedy for some, as one can never know what is at the bottom of a lake. Cliff diving is highly discouraged at Corps lakes. Corps officials posted signs at many local lake ‘hot-spots’ but concedes there may be other places they have not identified. The bottom line is never dive into lakes and rivers ... the results can be tragic.

“We highly encourage everyone to go out this Memorial Day weekend and enjoy our lakes but remember to think about boating and water safety before the fun begins, as we want you to return home safely to your homes, friends and loved ones,” stated Muraski.

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About the Fort Worth District: The Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was established in 1950. The District is responsible for water resources development in two-thirds of Texas, and design and construction at military installations in Texas and parts of Louisiana and New Mexico. Visit the Fort Worth District Web site at: www.swf.usace.army.mil.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – FORT WORTH DISTRICT
819 TAYLOR STREET
FORT WORTH, TX 76102
WWW.SWF.USACE.ARMY.MIL